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TUTOR HANDBOOKS: HEURISTIC TEXTS FOR NEGOTIATING DIFFERENCE IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

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I would like to begin this article by telling a true story. When I was a graduate student earning my doctoral degree, I worked in a writing center on a midsized and predominantly white university campus. Every week I attended and sometimes facilitated the writing center's tutor education workshop. At one of these meetings, an undergraduate tutor from a Euro-American background said that one of the things she liked about working at the writing center was that if she had a question about grammar during a conference with a client, she could simply lean over to the next table and ask another tutor for advice. In response to this statement, an African-American tutor said that she would *never* ask another tutor for grammar help because she felt that doing so would undermine her authority and lead clients to question her competence in Standard American English. At this point a bilingual Asian-American tutor said that clients often doubted her ability to tutor based solely on her appearance. For many of her American clients she was too foreign, while for many of her international clients she was not American enough. This discussion was a revelation for many of the Euro-American tutors, since it had never occurred to them that one's physical appearance could bring his or her linguistic competence into question. All of the tutors learned a great deal from this remarkable discussion, and the theory and practice of the writing center shifted in ways that more fully accounted for the experiences of tutors from diverse backgrounds.

I tell this story for two reasons. First, it focuses on the often-overlooked experiences of writing tutors from diverse cultural, linguistic, and national backgrounds. And second, this story illustrates what I mean by the phrase "negotiate with difference," which I will use throughout this article. I borrow this phrase from the New London Group and loosely define it as accepting and learning from cultural, linguistic, national, and other forms of difference. Twenty-first century linguistic and cultural realities require this kind of flexible negotiation with difference, and nowhere is this more true than in the multicultural and multilingual contexts where writing center work now takes place. Higher education has become a globalized enterprise, after all, with more than 700,000 international students attending U.S. colleges and universities during the 2010/11 academic year alone ("Open Doors"). Most of these students were non-native speakers of English, and I suspect that quite a few of them eventually made their way to the nearest writing center. Though writing centers might not conceptualize their work with these international ESL students as remedial, from an institutional standpoint the dominant assumption among administrators and faculty alike is that writing centers should perform remedial work with non-native speakers of English. This expectation that writing centers should "fix" the English of international ESL students ties in with broader assumptions that privilege monolingual Euro-American viewpoints. Rather than accepting institutional forces geared to the maintenance of these viewpoints, however, writing center specialists can take a leadership role in promoting a more multicultural and multilingual worldview. In doing so, writing centers can help prepare the academy for the complex cultural, linguistic, and national negotiations with difference that characterize our increasingly globalized world.

Before we begin shifting our writing centers to a more global orientation, however, it might be productive to reexamine our theory and practice, keeping a close watch for how we might be complicit in the maintenance of monocultural and monolingual power structures. Among other areas, this

reexamination could focus on the tutor handbooks that we rely upon for tutor professional development. Though tutor handbooks have served the field well, they are nonetheless overdue for a comprehensive revision. What form this revision might take has yet to be articulated within the field of Writing Center Studies, however. Tutor handbooks have largely escaped critical scrutiny, in fact, and have received relatively little scholarly attention despite Harvey Kail's observation that tutor handbooks have considerable "research value" as primary texts embodying our field's theory and practice ("Separation" 74). A relatively small number of journal articles, anthologized essays, and book chapters have considered tutor handbooks, albeit as part of a larger interrogation of an entirely different topic.[1] Book reviews, in fact, have long served as the primary location for conversations about tutor handbooks.[2] These book reviews and other pieces do not collectively amount to an extended dialogue within the field about tutor handbooks, however. My point here is that while the field has devoted considerable attention to tutor education and professional development, it has not yet conducted a vigorous interrogation of the tutor handbooks utilized for this tutor education.

In an attempt to fill this gap in writing center scholarship, I seek in this article to extend the conversation begun in the book reviews and other pieces mentioned above. Specifically, I consider how contemporary tutor handbooks construct tutor identity as monolingual Euro-American and reinforce—however inadvertently—an array of dominant monocultural and monolingual assumptions that forestall productive negotiations with difference. This article then considers how the next generation of tutor handbooks can be designed to foster more inclusive multicultural and multilingual assumptions, such as the recognition and validation of diverse tutor identities. In doing so, redesigned tutor handbooks can facilitate productive negotiations with difference just like the negotiation that occurred during the tutor education workshop that I described at the start of this article. As a result of the negotiations that took place in that workshop, African-American and Asian-American tutors helped Euro-American tutors to understand their own privileged position, recognize how it came at the expense of those not similarly privileged, and question the underlying monocultural and monolingual assumptions that facilitated this privileging. In the multicultural milieus characteristic of twenty-first century writing centers, these kinds of negotiation with difference are a prerequisite for productive tutoring. Ultimately, the redesign of tutor handbooks proposed in this article will align these texts with the writing center model advocated by Nancy Grimm, which is built around a "core value" of "productive and flexible engagement with linguistic, social, racial, and cultural diversity" (15). Such a model more fully accounts for the cultural and linguistic realities of the globalized contexts where writing center work now takes place.

Generation 2.0 Handbooks: Monocultural and Monolingual

The parameters of this article exclude what I term Generation 1.0 tutor handbooks, such as Muriel Harris' *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference* and Emily Meyer and Louise Smith's *The Practical Tutor*. Though these early handbooks from the 1970s and 80s contain much of value, they are nonetheless no longer fully representative of writing center theory and practice. Moreover, relatively few writing centers now use these handbooks for tutor education. For these reasons, I have chosen to focus this article on what I term Generation 2.0 handbooks. These more recently published handbooks are authored by contemporary writing center specialists well known in the field, printed by major textbook publishers, and widely used in writing centers nationwide (Gill). Several of these Generation 2.0 handbooks have been updated in second, third, fourth or even fifth editions, which provides further evidence of their continued use in tutor education workshops. The six Generation 2.0 handbooks considered in this article include the following titles:

- *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* (Ryan and Zimmerelli)
- *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors* (Bruce and Rafoth)

The Harcourt Brace Guide to Peer Tutoring (Capossela)
The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring (Gillespie and Lerner)
A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One (Rafoth)
What the Writing Tutor Needs to Know (Soven).

Monocultural and monolingual assumptions remain deeply embedded in the discourse of Generation 2.0 tutor handbooks, which implicitly assume a homogenous U.S. educational context while largely ignoring multicultural and multilingual educational contexts outside the United States. This mirrors larger trends in Writing Center Studies, which as Lynne Ronesi points out, is largely concerned with writing centers within the United States. For these reasons, monolingual Euro-American tutors from middle-class backgrounds remain the presumed readers of tutor handbooks. This assumption ignores the fact that writing centers are proliferating across the globe in a wide variety of academic contexts. As director of the writing center at the American University of Sharjah (AUS) in the Middle East, for example, Ronesi found that selecting tutor handbooks and similar educational materials for tutor education was a challenge, since writing center "training literature has yet to address contexts outside North America" (76). With its "US-centric" focus, tutor education materials are geared to a U.S. context and consequently to users who are assumed to be monocultural and monolingual U.S. tutors. At AUS, however, the student body is multicultural, multilingual, and multinational. In addition, relatively few students on this strikingly cosmopolitan campus come from Euro-American backgrounds. Though the tutors at the AUS Writing Center reflect the diversity of the larger student body, they do not reflect the cultural and linguistic identities of the tutors who are the target users of Generation 2.0 tutor handbooks. This led Ronesi to design a tutor education program that encouraged tutors to draw on their own experience and "establish a body of local understanding that would serve our purposes" as writing tutors from diverse cultural, linguistic, and national backgrounds who work with equally diverse clients in a context outside the United States (79).

While Generation 2.0 tutor handbooks typically assume a U.S. context for writing center work, they also position tutors as cultural and linguistic insiders who are native members of U.S. culture and native speakers of English. The handbooks present this insider knowledge as a tutoring strength, since as Judith Powers suggests, such knowledge can allow tutors to serve as cultural and linguistic "informants" when working with international clients. The unstated assumption is not only that tutors are cultural insiders and native speakers, but that this is the only possible identity for tutors to hold. Consequently, handbooks fail to make room for tutors from alternative cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring, for example, opens the chapter titled "Working with ESL Writers" with the following paragraph:

> We have often found that a large source of anxiety for new tutors surrounds the work they will do with ESL writers. "Will my knowledge of grammatical terms and rules be adequate?" they wonder. "Will my session get bogged down in line-by-line identification and correction of error?" they fear. "Will I emerge from a session spent and bleary eyed, hoping to find someone to talk about big ideas and not the minutia of English mechanics?" they ask. "Will I be pushed into the role of editor instead of being a tutor?" they fear. Certainly, these concerns are understandable; after all, *many of you have had little contact up to this point with ESL writers.* (Gillespie and Lerner 117; emphasis added)

As this excerpt illustrates, the opening of the chapter explicitly foregrounds tutor identity as monolingual, and, by implicit extension, Euro-American. The chapter also foregrounds the tutoring of multilingual clients as a stressful exercise in error correction for native English-speaking tutors. To be fair, later material in the chapter describes tutoring multilingual clients as a "rewarding" experience, but the opening paragraph nonetheless sets a negative tone that the remainder of the chapter never fully escapes (118). This tone dovetails with broader trends in the field, since as Harry Denny reminds us, writing centers

frequently respond to ESL clients as "problems" to "fix" (122).

On the infrequent occasions when multilingual and/or international tutors appear in Generation 2.0 handbooks, they are also presented as tutoring problems, since many of the clients they work with consider them unreliable cultural and linguistic informants who are not sufficiently American in terms of culture or dialect of English. One of the few discussions of multilingual international tutors found in *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors*, for example, centers on an international ESL client who does not believe such tutors are sufficiently skilled in English. The client defines a qualified tutor as a native speaker of English and admits a general unwillingness to work with multilingual international tutors (Bruce 221). As is true throughout *ESL Writers*, the focus in this chapter is on multilingual international clients rather than multilingual international tutors. This may be why the handbook misses an opportunity to problematize the common perception that multilingual international tutors lack sufficient tutoring expertise. As a result, the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of these tutors are positioned as problems that impede successful tutoring rather than productive resources for writing center work.

In most cases, however, multilingual tutors from diverse backgrounds are entirely absent from Generation 2.0 handbooks. This absence is facilitated by a false binary between two opposing identities—monolingual Euro-American tutor and multilingual international client. As a result, tutors holding alternative cultural and linguistic identities are simply erased. Though the binary between the monolingual Euro-American tutor and the multilingual international client is usually implicit in Generation 2.0 handbooks, the occasional explicit moments suggest that the binary is a dominant assumption underpinning the construction of tutor identity. *ESL Writers*, for example, includes several vignettes where the tutor has a name stereotypical of monolingual Euro-American consultants—Tina, Michelle, Beatrice—while the client has a name stereotypical of Asian international students—Ling, Reiko, Ji-Sook (21, 28, 97). The connotatively potent names used in these anecdotal accounts of tutor-client interactions reinforce the unstated assumption that tutors are from monolingual Euro-American backgrounds. This assumption is further reinforced by handbook chapters and subsections with titles like "Working with ESL Writers," "The Second Language Writer," and even "Tutoring Special Students" (Capossela 92; Ryan and Zimmerelli 65; Soven 102). Such chapters enforce the binary and in the process, rule out the possibility of a multilingual international tutor who is also an ESL writer.

The use of the possessive adjective "our" to mark tutors as U.S. cultural natives provides yet another illustration of the binary in action. One chapter in *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One*, for example, explains that "the most rewarding way to cross cultures is to converse over time with international students about *our* perceptions of cultural differences and build toward a mutual understanding" (Severino 45; emphasis added). Similarly, *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* informs tutors that "you will need to explain *our* culture's rules and customs about citing sources and doing one's own work" (Ryan and Zimmerelli 62; emphasis added). As these examples illustrate, Generation 2.0 handbooks do recognize that international clients might be unfamiliar with U.S. culture and that this lack of familiarity can pose formidable challenges in an academic environment geared to U.S. cultural and historical knowledge. However, no handbook considers the possibility that tutors might also be unfamiliar with U.S. culture and history because they are citizens of another nation, recent immigrants to this country, or members of a U.S. cultural group that does not correspond to dominant cultural values. Any cross-cultural interaction is assumed to be a binary one of Euro-American tutor and international client, which leaves little room for tutors to hold alternative identities.

Though Generation 2.0 handbooks give some play to diverse *client* identities—albeit in ways that often reinforce monocultural and monolingual assumptions—they give little or no play to diverse *tutor* identities. The recently published second edition of *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors* remains a partial exception to this trend, however, as it embraces

a broader sense of educational context and tutor identity. The introduction notes that the second edition "expands the definition of students and tutors with respect to their linguistic backgrounds" and "focuses greater attention on the diversity of cultural and literacy identities among students and tutors" (Bruce and Rafoth ix). That said, *ESL Writers* does not entirely escape traditional assumptions about tutor identity, as noted in the examples cited earlier in this article. However, in recognizing the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of writing tutors, *ESL Writers* points toward the next generation of tutor handbooks.

Generation 3.0 Handbooks: Multicultural and Multilingual

The next generation of tutor handbooks—Generation 3.0—should be designed to reflect the increasing cultural, linguistic, and geographic diversity of twenty-first century writing centers. This would align Generation 3.0 handbooks with scholars who argue that pedagogical theory and practice grounded in monocultural and monolingual assumptions must give way to multicultural and multilingual orientations that account for the cultural and linguistic diversity of contemporary educational contexts (Bawarshi; Canagarajah; Denny; Grimm; Horner and Trimbur; Lu, "An Essay," "Living"; Matsuda; New London Group; Pratt). Tailoring Generation 3.0 handbooks to the multicultural and multilingual character of contemporary writing center work, however, will require a substantial redesign of the genre.

As a starting point, Generation 3.0 handbooks could position multilingualism as the norm rather than English monolingualism. Doing so would answer the call of Bruce Horner and John Trimbur, who believe U.S. educators must abandon the "tacit language policy of unidirectional English monolingualism" that underpins writing instruction in the United States today (594). Such an orientation would also align tutor handbooks with writing center specialists who call for positioning multilingualism as the "conceptual norm" in writing center work (Denny; Grimm 17). Ultimately, making multilingualism the default assumption in tutor handbooks would normalize multilingual tutors and work to level unjust linguistic hierarchies.

Generation 3.0 handbooks could also work to make tutors from diverse backgrounds both visible and prominent. Furthermore, Generation 3.0 handbooks could position these tutors as skilled negotiators of cultural and linguistic difference who are remarkably well suited for working in twenty-first century writing centers. In other words, Generation 3.0 handbooks would position multilingual tutors from diverse cultural backgrounds as assets, not as problems. As numerous scholars have argued, such students are linguistically nimble, culturally sophisticated, and endowed with an intuitive understanding of how to negotiate difference (Canagarajah; Horner; Lu, "An Essay," "Living"; Matsuda; Pratt; Trimbur). For these reasons, writing center specialists assert that multilingual tutors enrich the writing centers where they work, since they bring with them a cultural and linguistic sophistication well suited to negotiating the myriad forms of difference that are a constant, if often unacknowledged, feature of writing center work (Denny; Grimm). Current tutor handbooks make little space for such tutors, but Generation 3.0 handbooks can provide that space and foster inclusive notions of tutor identity.

However, this diverse sense of tutor identity cannot move beyond what Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope of the New London Group call superficial "spaghetti and polka multiculturalism" unless writing centers are reconceptualized as inclusive communities of practice (136). To put this in the terminology of social learning theorists Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave, writing centers should offer tutors the opportunity to advance from legitimate peripheral participation—i.e., participation as a newcomer, novice, or apprentice—to full participation in their communities of practice (*Situated*). All tutors should be offered this participation, not just the monolingual Euro-American tutors who fit dominant paradigms of tutor identity. Such participation will allow tutors to gain what Wenger calls "negotiability," or the ability to make meaning within a community of practice (*Communities* 197). This negotiability can give *all* tutors a say in the ongoing evolution of writing center

knowledge, and the more diverse the tutors, the more likely this evolution will be characterized by the redesign, rather than just the reproduction, of existing theory and practice. The story that opens this article illustrates just this sort of productive redesign, with a diverse group of tutors collaboratively reexamining and reshaping the assumptions that underpinned the theory and practice of their work as writing tutors. Ultimately, all tutors should play a role in designing the social futures of not just their own individual writing center community of practice, but the broader community of practice that encompasses all writing centers worldwide.

Indeed, Generation 3.0 tutor handbooks could be specifically designed for the globalized contexts where contemporary writing centers are situated. Underpinning this design would be the assumption that globalization is an ongoing process of hybridization (Nederveen Pieterse). Recognizing the inherent hybridity of language and culture would work to disrupt the simplistic binaries that now pervade Generation 2.0 handbooks, such as the "our culture" versus "their culture" view of tutoring ESL clients that renders multilingual and/or international tutors a conceptual impossibility. This global focus also means that Generation 3.0 handbooks could look beyond the United States and incorporate a writing center theory and practice that stems from diverse contexts throughout the world, such as the American University of Sharjah. Incorporating such contexts into Generation 3.0 handbooks would allow these texts to better serve writing centers outside the United States, of course, but just as importantly, it would also allow writing centers inside the U.S. to benefit from the knowledge and experience of writing centers located in other countries. This incorporation of contexts outside the United States would also align with a focus on the inclusive communities of practice that should underpin the design of Generation 3.0 handbooks, since writing centers located abroad would become full participants in a broad community of practice that formerly consisted only of writing centers in the United States.

Tutor handbooks are powerful heuristic texts for undergraduate tutors, the frontline troops of writing center work. For this reason, there are significant ethical responsibilities inherent to designing Generation 3.0 handbooks. First among these responsibilities is the obligation to design handbooks that foster writing center communities of practice where all tutors, no matter what their cultural, linguistic, and national background, can have a say in shaping the theory and practice of those communities. Only then can tutor handbooks reach their full potential as heuristic texts for the diverse tutors who will work in twenty-first century writing centers characterized by the continual, productive, and welcoming interplay of difference.[3]

Notes

[1.] For examples of scholarly texts that examine tutor handbooks to a greater or lesser degree, see Geller *et al.*; Gill; Kilborn; McKinney; Shamoon and Burns; Thonus, "Triangulation"; Vandenberg.

[2.] For reviews of tutor handbooks, see Braxley; Brown; Cella; Chapman; Denny, Day, and Fels; Donovan; Doolan; Hackworth and Johanek; Harris, J.; Kail, Rev. of *The Practical*; McDonald; Quintana; Scheer; Silk; Thonus, Rev. of *ESL*; Wingate.

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